

SECRET/NOFORN

September ²⁶~~19~~, 1969

Dear Phil:

You mentioned to Tony Lake the bad blood between Le Duc Tho and Le Duan in the 1950's.

Attached is a CIA report on the subject. I had not known of this before, and I am glad you mentioned it.

It was good to see you.

Warm regards,
(Signed) Henry

Henry A. Kissinger

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ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

The Honorable Philip C. Habib
Vietnam Peace Mission
American Embassy
Paris, France

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September 18, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John Holdridge

SUBJECT: The Supposed Le Duan-Le Duc Tho Rift

You have indicated an interest in the particulars of the reported friction which has occurred in past years between the North Vietnamese Party First Secretary, Le Duan, and the chief Hanoi negotiator in Paris, Le Duc Tho. The attached assessment of this question was prepared for us by CIA (Tab A). It concludes that:

- The evidence is so scanty and of such questionable reliability, that only a few broad conclusions can be drawn.
- It does appear that Duan and Tho clashed over policy and were rivals while heading up the Communist apparatus in South Vietnam in the 1950's.
- Duan appears to have favored a full steam ahead, aggressive approach to the insurgency, while Tho was more deliberate, favoring a slower measured approach (this seems to tally with their styles in recent years).
- By the latter 1950's, Duan clearly was the senior of the two in the Party apparatus and Tho seems to have worked in harmony with him from Hanoi in directing activities in South Vietnam.
- There is no solid evidence that the problems between the two in the past have persisted into the present.

Comment: We regard the CIA analysis as sound.

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17 September 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Le Duan-Le Duc Tho Rift

1. This memo describes the Le Duan-Le Duc Tho rift which reportedly took place in the early 1950's while both were leaders of the Viet Minh apparatus in what was then called Nambo and what is now the lower third of South Vietnam.

2. Our knowledge of that period is incomplete and imprecise. It is based on a melange of reports

events of that time. Despite these limitations, we are reasonably confident that a close examination of the evidence establishes that certain events indeed occurred and makes possible some broad judgements.

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3. Le Duan arrived in Nambo around 1947 as the top Communist party (Dang Lao Dong or DLD) official for that region. From this formidable power base, he established himself as overall commander of Nambo within three years.

4. Le Duc Tho was dispatched to Nambo in late 1949/early 1950. Like Duan, he was a ranking DLD official. It seems clear from the evidence, however, that Tho was envisaged as a subordinate of Duan's responsible for administrative and internal party affairs and the organization of fronts and mass groups. He was consistently identified as Duan's second-in-command.

5. Tho seems to have clashed with Duan almost immediately after his arrival. The crux of their dispute has never been made clear. Some sources suggest it was personal, others that it revolved around tactics and style. According to this school, Duan favored persistence and severity in implementing directives while Tho counseled patience and moderation.

6. Most sources agree that some re-alignment of power soon took place in Nambo. Duan, according

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to these reports, retained titular command, but his de facto authority was rivaled, if not surpassed by Tho's. For example, Tho reportedly remained at Nambo's central headquarters while Duan shifted his operation out into the provinces.

7. On the surface, this would appear to indicate that Tho had prevailed. Later events suggest, however, that the DLD leadership (maybe Ho himself or then Secretary-General Truong Chinh) chose not to meet the matter head on, but to dispose of it indirectly, perhaps due to the stature and talents of the antagonists. It is clear in any case that the rift did not damage Le Duan.

8. Duan was recalled to North Vietnam in early 1953 and Tho formally assumed his titles and authority. It presumably was during this period that Duan solidified his position in the DLD hierarchy (one report indicates he became party Secretary-General pro tempore during one of Truong Chinh's trips to China) and established himself as the party's top man for affairs in South Vietnam. Following the 1954 Geneva Accords,

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Tho returned to North Vietnam and became a member of the DLD politburo. He, then, apparently began his long career as the top party organization official.

9. Meanwhile, Duan took unchallenged control of the Communist effort below the 17th parallel. Some evidence suggests Tho assisted in this effort from time-to-time, but clearly under Duan's direction. At the same time, Duan was rising rapidly through the DLD hierarchy. He returned to North Vietnam sometime in 1957 and immediately emerged as a major party spokesman. He is believed to have become de facto DLD first secretary soon after Truong Chinh's ouster in late 1956. At the 1960 Party Congress, Duan was formally invested as First Secretary and ranked second in the DLD, only below Ho.

10. Some [redacted]

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[redacted] claim that the Le Duan-Le Duc Tho rift still rankles and complicates their personal relationships. Not surprisingly,

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[redacted]
that this could be one of the mythologies, nurtured by time and lack of solid information,

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which have grown about Hanoi's leadership.

11. In his dual party role as a member of the DLD central committee secretariate and head of the DLD organization department, Le Duc Tho is responsible to First Secretary Le Duan. Some sort of close personal contact would seem to be suggested here and, since both have held their present positions for about a decade, their relationship would appear to be at least workable.

12. There also is an association between the two men in running the insurgency in the South. Le Duan's primary responsibility for policy formulation in this area has been well documented. Le Duc Tho's association with this problem is reflected in his appointment as head of the Communist delegation at the Paris talks.

13. The record of the past 15 years contains no solid indication that the Duan-Tho problems of the early 50's have persisted to the present. On the contrary, the association of the two in important areas of policy -- party and the war -- suggest more harmony than discord in their personal relations.

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